

Koinonia Year Two—March
Content from *Growing Faithful*
Scripture from the NRSV Bible

Third Sunday of Great Lent
Sunday of the Exaltation (Adoration) of the Holy Cross
Hebrews 4:14-5:6 Mark 8:34-9:1

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, Amen.

LIVING LENT—

Sunday of the Veneration of the Precious and Life-giving Cross

As they who walk on a long and hard way and are bowed down by fatigue find great relief and strengthening under the cool shade of a leafy tree, so do we find comfort, refreshment, and rejuvenation under the Life-giving Cross, which our Holy Fathers “planted” on this Sunday. Thus, we are fortified and enabled to continue our Lenten journey with a light step, rested and encouraged. (*Synaxarian of the Lenten Triodion and Pentecostarion*)

Apolytikion of the Third Sunday of Lent, the Veneration of the Cross

Lord, save your people, and bless your inheritance,
granting to faithful Christians victories over their enemies,
and protecting your commonwealth by your Cross.

HEAR the Word of God—

Hebrews 4:14-5:6

¹⁴Since, then, we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast to our confession. ¹⁵For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who in every respect has been tested as we are, yet without sin. ¹⁶Let us therefore approach the throne of grace with boldness, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

^{5:1}Every high priest chosen from among mortals is put in charge of things pertaining to God on their behalf, to offer gifts and sacrifices for sins. ²He is able to deal gently with the ignorant and wayward, since he himself is subject to weakness; ³and because of this he must offer sacrifice for his own sins as well as for those of the people. ⁴And one does not presume to take this honor, but takes it only when called by God, just as Aaron was.

⁵So also Christ did not glorify himself in becoming a high priest, but was appointed by the one who said to him, “You are my Son, today I have begotten you”; ⁶as he says also in another place, “You are a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek.”

Mark 8:34-9:1

³⁴He (Jesus) called the crowd with his disciples, and said to them, “If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. ³⁵For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake, and for the sake of the gospel, will save it. ³⁶For what will it profit them to gain the whole world and forfeit their life? ³⁷Indeed, what can they give in return for their life? ³⁸Those who are ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of them the Son of Man will also be ashamed when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels.” ^{9:1}And he said to them, “Truly I tell you, there are some standing here who will not taste death until they see that the kingdom of God has come with power.”

SHARE thoughts and insights—

- What does the word “cross” bring to your mind?
- Do you wear a cross? If so, why do you wear one?
- The cross of Jesus...
 - Do you often think about the cross of Jesus?
 - What does the cross of Jesus mean to you?... for you?
 - How does the cross of Jesus really make a difference in your life?
 - What would your life be like without the cross of Jesus?
 - How and why is the cross of Jesus life-giving?
- Jesus says, “*If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me*” (verse 34).
 - Do you want to follow Jesus?
 - How (and/or what) do you need to deny yourself?
 - What does it mean to *take up* your cross? (Perhaps it would be helpful to think of a cross as another name for a burden when answering this question.)
 - Describe your cross.
 - How do you carry your cross?
- Where do you go to *receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need* (Hebrews 4:16)?
(You might want to think about and discuss the meaning of *mercy* and *grace*.)

GROW in faith—

- For meditation and prayer to grow in faith:

For adults—

Without the cross there can be no true growth and no true strengthening of the spiritual life. To avoid the weight of this cross is to avoid our responsibility towards our brethren and our neighbors before God. Only by the cross can we remain in submission to God and in true love towards our neighbors. We cannot purify or develop our own spiritual life, nor that of others, nor that of the world in general, by seeking to avoid the cross. Consequently, we do not discover either the depth or the greatness of the potential forces and powers of this world as a gift of God if we try to live without the cross. The way of the cross is the only way which leads us upwards, the only way which carries creation towards the true heights for which it was made. This is the signification which we understand of the cross of Christ. (Father Dumitru Staniloae, *The Victory of the Cross*)

“The cross sanctifies the universe.”

-Archbishop Anastasios

For all ages—

“The cross is I crossed out.”

-Anonymous

Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight and the sin that clings so closely, and let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith, who for the sake of the joy that was set before him endured the cross, disregarding its shame, and has taken his seat at the right hand of the throne of God.

Consider him who endured such hostility against himself from sinners, so that you may not grow weary or lose heart (Hebrews 12:1-3).

SERVE one another in love—

- Do you know someone who is carrying a heavy cross (burden) right now? How could you help carry his or her cross (burden)? Act on your good intention. *Help to carry one another's burdens, and in this way you will obey the law of Christ (Galatians 6:2 GNB).*

PRAY —

Take a small piece of heavy paper. On one side draw a cross. On the other side write a prayer, such as

Lord, Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me the sinner.

- or -

Lord, Jesus Christ, have mercy on me.

- or -

Lord, have mercy.

- or -

Father, forgive...

(See Luke 23:34.)

Keep this prayer in your pocket each day from now to Pascha. At night, place it on your nightstand by your bed. Whenever you touch or see this paper, let it be a reminder to pray.

The Lenten Prayer of St. Ephraim of Syria

Lord and Master of my life,

Give me not a spirit of idleness, vain curiosity, lust for power, and idle talk.

But rather give to me your servant a spirit of purity, humility, patience, and love.

Yes, Lord and King, grant me to see my own sins, and not to judge my brother and sister; for you are blessed to the ages of ages.

Amen.